



THE BERMAN BRIEFING

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF SENATE DISTRICT 31



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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

January 2020

Happy New Year! As we enter the year 2020, it is hard to believe it has been 20 years since the turn of the century. The holiday season was a nice time to relax, reflect and enjoy downtime. I hope you and your families and friends were able to do the same.

Legislative Updates & Local Happenings

In early December, our delegation held its last public hearing for 2019. The meeting took place at the Loxahatchee Groves campus of Palm Beach State College. A joint workshop with the League of Cities followed. Testimony was heard from constituents and organizations alike, and the joint workshop was crucial to understanding the needs and concerns of our municipal governments. Lunch hosted by the Farm Bureau took place immediately afterwards, which included chicken and vegetables grown here in Palm Beach County. It might surprise some of you to learn that Palm Beach County leads the nation in the production of fresh sweet corn!

Due to recent knee surgery, I had been unable to attend as many events as I normally would, including the final designated committee week in December. However, thanks to the graciousness of my Senate colleagues, three of my bills were presented on my behalf, with all three advancing to their next committee stops. I expect to be recovered and ready to take on Tallahassee at the start of session!

The first of my bills that was presented in my absence was SB 648, Sargassum Seaweed Matching Grant Program. Presented by Chair Montford of the Environmental and Natural Resources Committee, SB 648 passed unanimously. Additionally, SB 358, Decedents' Property, was passed by the Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee unanimously. This was the bill's second committee stop. It now only needs to be heard in the Rules Committee before heading to the Senate floor. Lastly, a bill I am sponsoring on behalf of the Business Law Section of the Bar, known as UCECRA, passed in the Judiciary Committee.

I enjoyed attending the annual Jewish Federation legislative "send-off" in mid-December. It was great to see many of the partners we work with in the community, from JARC to JFS.



Recently Filed Legislation

Since our last newsletter, I have filed two additional bills.

I am exceptionally proud to have, for the second consecutive year, legislation that is a step forward for the solar industry. It is a shame we do not harness the power of Florida's sunshine into a positive driver of our economy where so much potential exists. Many states around our country continue to lead in utilizing the power of the sun and reducing their carbon footprint. It is time for Florida to join the ranks of these states and become more sustainable.

SB 1290 would allow schools, if they so choose, to install a 100 kilowatt system. This could save an average of \$16,000 per year and offset over 10 percent of their energy demand, according to estimates by Vote Solar, a national solar advocacy non-profit. If every public school participated, those savings would add up to over \$70 million per year.

The bill proposes three common-sense solutions to address current roadblocks preventing the switch to cost-saving solar:

- It allows schools to enter into financing agreements to purchase solar power from an on-site solar system owned by a solar company at a predictable fixed price that lowers their energy costs.
- It allows school districts to aggregate multiple electric meters across a single county for purposes of net metering, enabling the sharing of solar credits from a single solar system.
- It clarifies that schools' clean energy investments do not count against per pupil construction spending caps under Florida law.

Additionally, I have sponsored SB 1296, Health Access Dental Licenses, to allow dentists from other states in our country to practice here in Florida in underserved health settings without the supervision of a Florida licensed dentist. Currently there is a shortage in terms of dentists desiring to serve in these underserved and underrepresented areas. It is our hope that this legislation could enable dentists who have a passion to serve impoverished communities can now do so without as much bureaucratic complications.

The 2020 session will begin on Tuesday, January 14. We will be hosted by the House of Representatives for a joint session of the Legislature, whereby the House receives the Governor, Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Affairs for the "State of the State". I am looking forward to a productive session representing the constituents of District 31. Thank you again for the great honor of representing you.



Wishing you and your loved ones a peaceful and healthy start to 2020!

Jori Benn